critical digest

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New York Theatre Diary

The Shrike- City Center 11/25/53. Second limited run production of NYC Theatre Company with Jose Ferrer as director and star of the Joseph Kramm revival. Judith Evelyn featured, sets designed by Howard Bay.

Current Theatre Reviews

Escapade- 48th St Theatre 11/18/53. "Con" reviews, unanimous,but mild, greeted Roger MacDougall's comedy, presented by Alfred de Liagre and Roger Stevens and starring British actress Ursual Jeans. Most admitted some of the acting was fine, but script they tabbed as poor. Brian Aherne, who stepped into role when Jeans' husband, Roger Livesey got ill, was okayed, while Melville Cooper won top critical honors. Atkinson,Times, summed it up as a play with good ideas and trifling workmanship. While Kerr, Herald Tribune, thought it meanders too much. News aisle-sitter,Chapman, couldn't figure out why staff and cast wasted their time on show which is still a current London hit. It widened the rift between England and US, he panned. British might like such tepid little charades, but Coleman,Mirror, didn't. Watts,Post, who had enjoyed the London production, blamed the quality of the production and acting for show's failure to repeat its success here. Feeble fare, concludes McClain,Journal American. Talking about the action instead of depicting it was the reason Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, was unexcited.

Don Juan Tenorio- Spanish Theatre- Broadhurst 11/19/53. For those with a good working knowledge of Spanish, the Aleandra Ulloa company production of the Spanish classic drama by Jose Zorilla was recommended by the NY drama critics. Bracker, Times, pointed out that for those who do not know the language the even will be regarded as static, with action invariably lagging behind the declamation. Several of the reviewers noted that the sets were on the shoddy side. Troupeis playing limited run repertory of 10 plays between South American engagements. Sylvester, news, okayed productions for Spaniards and Latin Americans. Watts,Post, reported that audience vigorously applauded all of the long speeches, of which there were plenty.

Out of Town Tryouts

The Prescott Proposals, Lindsay & Crouse's new comedy drama with Katharine Cornell, needs plenty of work to move it into the Broadway hit class, comments,Bone, Variety's New Haven mugg. Problem is one of coming up with more stirring theatre after probing an original subject...Flame-Out,a new comedy drama by actor Alan Mowbray, also needs much work, notes Eck,Variety's Hartford mugg. All male cast could use some sex, plus strengthening of characters...John Murray Anderson's Almanac, opened its tryout tour in Boston, has more than enough for a hit musical, okays Variety man. In first showing it was much too long, while first impressions show that the people rather than the material will make the hit.

Village Theatre

Michael and His Lost Angels presented d Amato Theatre by Showcase Theatre on Mon to Thur with Sylvia Leigh and Edward Bruce...French Art Theatre 112 W 13,has launched a $10,000 fund raising campaign to present 3 plays at Carnegie Recital Hall...One Foot to Sea is now in its 6th month at Originals Only, a mid-night Sat performance is given...Gilbert and Sullivan being presented at Provincetown Thur to Sats

Off Broadway

The Quick Years, a new play by Van Burjally, presented by Actors & Writers Theatre at St. Clemens Church, 423 W 46 Nov 24-29...Bowm Adams Studio continues Sat showcase of short plays.

Climate of Eden, production at tiny Current Stages, won rave review from Atkinson,Times. Nothing amateur or obtuse,he noted,it draws the sweetness, good humor and wonder out of Moss Hart's play.Joseph Lehrman,the director, was credited with ingenuity and imagination. Actors were called generally excellent.

Vaudeville

William Brandt may try vaudeville 3 times a week at 4 of his NY houses... New Palace show features Victoria Sherry, Cleopatraand Co, Gil Johnson and Mike Madill, and Arriola Family.

Broadway TV Theatre

The Bat, the classic Mary Roberts Rinehart thriller of 1920, will be presented Nov 23-27 on WOR TV Broadway TV Theatre at 7 30 PM with Estelle Winwood. Show was last presented on Broadway in Jan 1953 with Zazu Pitts in the lead.Critics noted suspense items were nil, but the third act chase found most of the audience and critics laughing very hard. What had once been a thriller had turned into funny farce.

Theatre Book Comments

"Broadway Heartbeat", press agent Bernard Sobel's autobiography, won a pair of split notices from Rogow , Saturday Review and Nichols,Times. Former found only items on Ziegfeld era worthwhile, the remainder proving again that few in the theatre write interestingly of themselves. While Times critic found it all very enjoyable.

"Bring On the Girls", P G Wodehouse and Guy Bolton's story of old time musicals, okayed by Chapman,News. Book seems to be mostly Wodehouse,at once urbane and impish.

"The Oliviers", Felix Barker's biography(Lippincott), recommended by Patricia Collinge in Herald Tribune. Book at first seems too factual, but it is wise in letting the facts speak for themselves. Book helps, the actress adds, to renew reader's faith in theatre.

"The Traitor and Spy", James Thomas Flexner's biography of Revolutionary conspirator Major Andre, should interest historical minded theatre fans, points out Down,Variety. Andre was an actor, playwright and scenic designer, as well as the author of the first American pageant, "The Meshianza, produced in 1778.

Critic Contest

Late Love, which moved from the National to Booth, made a standing offer to NYC drama critics. As the show moved on its 2nd performance, producer Michael Abbott offered to let any drama critic who can prove he had 32 friends to bring them all to see the show for free.

Review Reports

Analysis of NYC daily, weekly reviews. Theatre, films, LP records. $1 per back title. Send check, money order CRITICAL DIGEST, 505-Fifth Ave, New York, 17, New York.

Green Room Department

READER'S CHOICE...Reviewers aren't to blame, but there is something in the way review readers receive the notices that makes it seem there are two sharply, contrasted categories of dramatic entertainment--hits and other shows, points out Chapman, Nation. The critic is not necessarily an educator, and he probably should not be a propagandist, the director-reviewer states, but he will be grateful to the reviewer who tells his readers that while the "faulty" plays of the top playwrights are part of the essential theatre, a great number of hits, though good to have, are expendable. Entertainment in the sense of titillation, he concludes, is more readily and cheaply come by outside the theatre.

COLUMN TIPS...Phil Baker is the next to launch a one-man show reports Morehouse... Rosalind Russell turned down Pal Joey film role, hears Eaton...Lee Shubert is talking with Sherry's about possible theatre bars, spots Gardner.

PEPPY INVALID...Theatre is more alive than ever, despite the onslaught of TV, wide-screen movies and the excess of professional criers, notes Sobel, Journal American. We have as many genuine hit shows now as in any season the columnist-critic can remember. Add to this the fact that tickets now cost double what they did in the days when 3 and 4 shows might open on a single night.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Debate over top billing in the theatre has lead to fracases unmatched since the Sioux scrambled Custer on the Little big Horn, comments Richard Maney in Herald Tribune...Kind Sir was summed up by Nathan, Journal American, as a boneless zero draped by Mary Martin and Charles Boyer in the flesh...Return to repertory in the form of Ferrer's 8 week City Center program is a happy augury of the days when such programs were popular, applauds Burr, Playbill.

MAILBOX..."Educational" shows listed by Chapman, News, to aid a reader who wants to send his daughter to same include: Porgy & Bess, Dial M For Murder, King & I, Ferrer shows, Comedy in Music, South Pacfic and Me and Juliet...Director of Sherlock Holmes, Reginald Denham, disagrees that recent flop was supposed to be a thriller.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...Theatre ticket brokers should be speculators, Max Gordon, producer of Solid Gold Cadillac, told Coleman, Mirror. They should invest in productions and then try to sell tickets to them. Too many young writers have nothing to say, producer believes. They don't write about interesting people and they don't have good plots. They know too little about characterization and construction.

Pros & Cons by TMK

Take a Giant Step ad campaign has been one of the most interesting and original breaks from the usual "quote" ad programs presented in years. Though some were too negative in character, they did tell patrons what the play was about and why they might like it. Producers, press agents and advertising agency men are to be thanked for taking this giant step forward.

CD Services

THEATRE NEWSLETTER--weekly digests NYC theatre news, reviews, comments. Ticket, critics reports. Drama books, records. Year round features. Ideal gift for "Stage struck" fans, students, etc. $10 year, $12.50 foreign. $25 for 3 years includes free Merman-Martin LP disc. Compiled by "Broadway in Brief" columnist.

Name.....

Address.....

3 Broadway musicals are packing to begin nationwide tours. Though five Broadway shows are listed for closing Nov 28, three of them will merely move their operations to other cities. "Guys and Dolls" opens its nationwide tour in Baltimore Nov 30, followed by Wilmington Dec 7 and Philadelphia Dec 14. "Porgy and Bess" opens December 1 in Philadelphia for a three week run before resuming a cross country tour. While "Wish You Were Here" moves swimming pool and all to Chicago. Straight plays which are due to close because of lack of business are "Take A Giant Step", and "Ladies of the Corridor." December is traditionally the slow month in the theatre and other shows are expected to close .

Plays

"Mademoiselle Columbe" is the new name of the Louis Kronenberger script based on Jean Anouilh French comedy which will star Julie Harris..."Dear Charles",the London hit comedy which stars Yvonne Arnaud, will feature Annabella on Broadway... "The Girl In Pink Tights" , the new musical based on Romberg songs, will open Feb 25 at the Hellinger.

People

Ina Claire and Claude Rains will star in T.S. Eliot's "The Confidential Clerk" due Feb 3 at Morosco...Arthur Schwartz has taken over the music assignment from Burton McLane in "By the Beautiful Sea"...Romney Brent will direct "Dear Charles"... Margaret Phillips will replace Gusti Huber in "Dial M For Murder"...Sam Jaffe will be featured in "Mademoiselle Colombe."

Theatre Book Notes

"Curtain Time", the American theatre from showboat days to theatre-in-the round, by Lloyd Morris published by Random House...1954 edition of "Stubs" published by Lenore Tobin includes NY and tryout theatres seating plans..."Modernism in Modern Drama" by Joseph Wood Krutch published by Cornell University Press...New Modern Library edition of 4 Shaw plays edited by Louis Kronenberger.

Theatre Obits

Edythe Totten, retired actress and founder of the "Drama-Comedy Club" died at age 68. The club met regularly in the 1920's to discuss theatre. Group was an outstanding success until it tried to build its own theatre in 1927. The house, located at Eighth Ave and 48th St is now a movie house.

Theatre TV & Radio Notes

NBC TV will produce Robert E. Sherwood's "The Backbone of America" Dec2...CBS TV "Camera 3" to devote 4 shows to Shakespeare starting Nov 28.

TUNE IN WNBC(NYC) BEN GRAUER 7 30 AM."CD" prepares brief summaries reviews new shows

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